

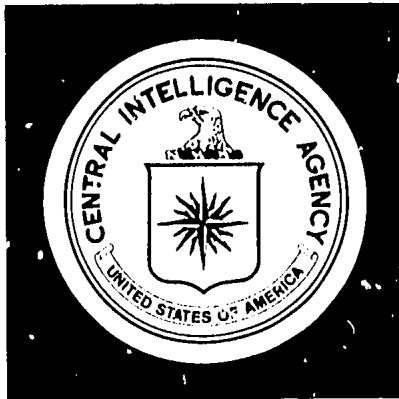
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

DPSD

Intelligence Memorandum

The Cambodian Insurgency: From Shadow to Substance

ARMY and DIA review(s) completed.

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12 February 1973
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
12 February 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Cambodian Insurgency: From Shadow to Substance

Summary

Cambodia, the last of the Indochinese states to become directly involved in the war, seems destined to be the last to restore peace. Khmer insurgents have not complied with the proposal of Prince Sihanouk, their ostensible political and military commander in chief, that they reciprocate Phnom Penh's standdown in offensive operations. From all indications, they are determined to fight on. The insurgent belligerence reflects a split between Sihanouk and his more nationalist-minded supporters in Peking and Cambodia on the one hand and the Khmer Communists, who dominate the insurgency, on the other. The local Communists are clearly reluctant to move toward a peace that might provide for Sihanouk's return to political authority in Cambodia. The Khmer insurgent's hard line is reinforced by their favorable position in the Cambodian countryside.

Starting with a small Cambodian insurgent group, the Vietnamese Communists over the past three years have developed a combat force estimated to number between 40,000 to 50,000 men. They have at the same time laid the foundation for a Khmer Communist - dominated political structure in sections of every province in the country. These insurgents appear to be in a position to exert some degree of administrative control over approximately 3.5 million of Cambodia's eight million people and over some 70 percent of its territory. Even more significantly, insurgent military forces over the past few months have shown a growing ability to organize and coordinate tactical operations over large areas and to establish road interdictions that threaten key government supply lines.

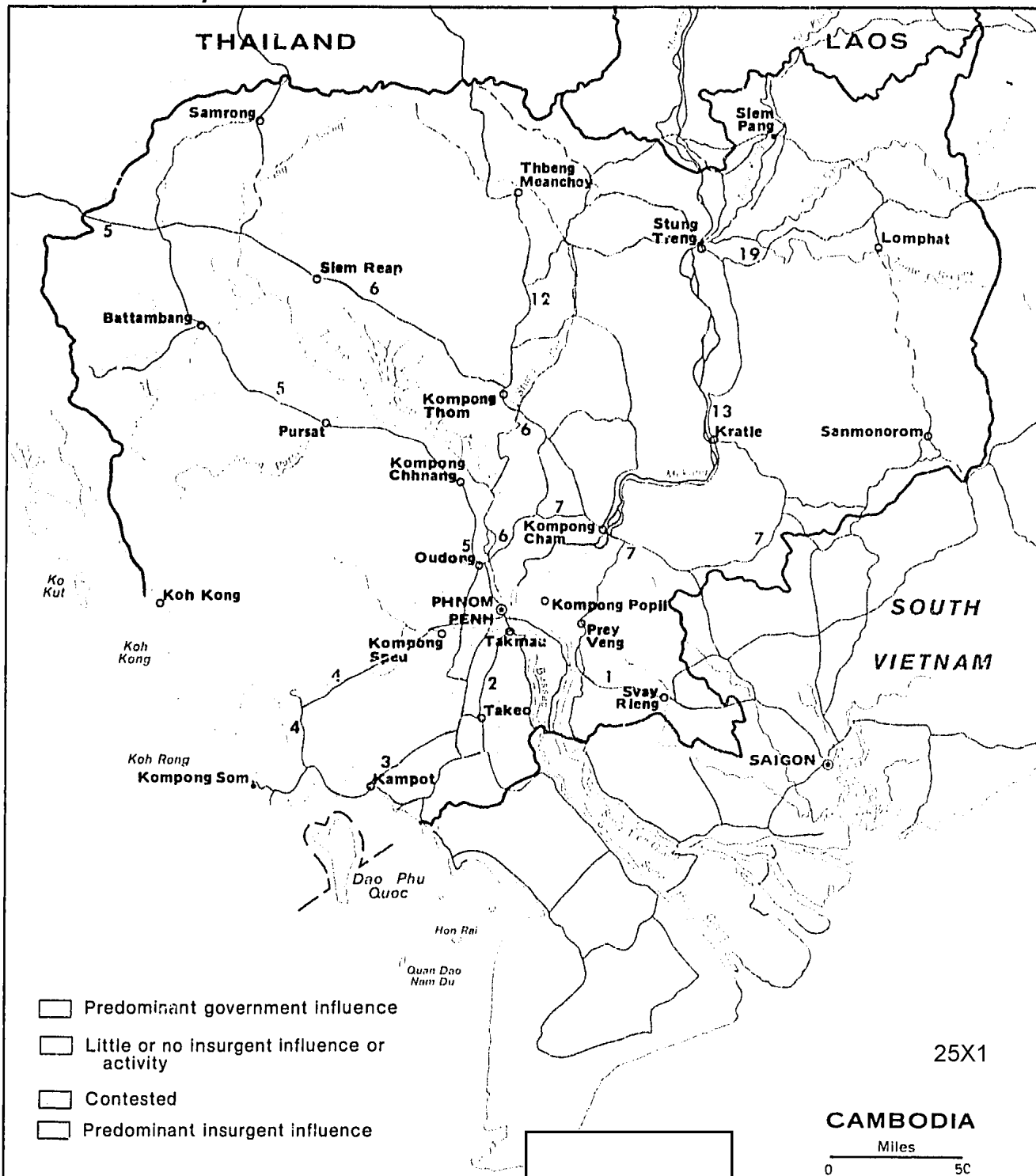
Despite their initial display of independence, the Khmer Communists will find it difficult, if not impossible, to resist the political tides in Indochina—especially if Hanoi is prepared to use its obvious leverage. When the shooting finally stops, Phnom Penh will be forced to recognize that in the search for a settlement the insurgents will be negotiating from a position of strength.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, with contributions from the Office of Economic Research, and was coordinated within CIA.

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Estimated Territorial Control as of January 1973



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Insurgency in the Sihanouk Era

Insurgency is not new to Cambodia. After gaining independence from France in 1953, Sihanouk's young government was for a time plagued by banditry and rebellion by Communist and non-Communist elements that had participated in the struggle for independence. The government gradually stamped out this lawlessness, and the ensuing calm lasted for a decade. In early 1967, however, the "Khmer Rouge rebellion" broke out in Battambang Province of western Cambodia. The rebels were anti-government peasants who launched a series of small attacks on Cambodian Army positions. Sihanouk blamed the dissidence on local Khmer Viet Minh cadres, who had remained in Cambodia rather than be repatriated to North Vietnam with the bulk of Viet Minh troops in 1954. He claimed they were obtaining "foreign support" and were being backed by prominent leftist politicians in Phnom Penh.

Although Communist agitation may have been a contributing factor, it seems likely that legitimate peasant resentment of unfair government rice-pricing policies and of the undisciplined behavior of Cambodian Army troops was responsible for much of the unrest. Whatever the case, the dissidence spread slowly to other provinces in the western half of the country over the following three years. At no time before Sihanouk's ouster, however, did the insurgency pose a significant threat to the government's stability.

Sihanouk was far more concerned over the development of tribal dissidence in the remote northeastern part of the country. Like the situation in the west, the insurgency in the northeast began to surface in late 1967 and was fueled by local grievances against the government. The situation in the northeast became more volatile when North Vietnam expanded its use of that area to support its war against South Vietnam. It soon became clear that the Vietnamese Communists were arming and directing disaffected tribesmen in Ratanakiri and neighboring provinces and were providing some with military training in North Vietnam. Egged on by the North Vietnamese, the insurgents' harassing attacks against government outposts in the northeast kept Cambodian Army forces in the area preoccupied and well away from Communist base areas and supply and infiltration lines.

By early 1969, North Vietnamese support to the tribal insurgency—as well as the growing numbers of Vietnamese Communist troops in the northeast and elsewhere along the eastern border areas—contributed to a significant cooling in relations between Phnom Penh and Hanoi. In the

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spring, an irritated Sihanouk clamped an embargo on the clandestine movement of arms from Sihanoukville through Cambodia to Communist forces in South Vietnam. The embargo remained in effect until September, when Sihanouk apparently received assurances from Hanoi that Vietnamese Communist forces in Cambodia would be more circumspect. Some of Sihanouk's subordinates who were involved in the management of the arms traffic nevertheless remained skeptical of Hanoi's sincerity and—rather than fully resume the arms shipments—doled them out in small quantities to test North Vietnamese intentions.

The Vietnamese Communists' failure to abide by their promises and Sihanouk's continuing inclination to accommodate them contributed heavily to his downfall. When Sihanouk abruptly departed Phnom Penh for France in early 1970, he left the government in the care of men like Sirik Matak, whose tolerance of the Vietnamese Communists—and of Sihanouk himself—had reached the point of no return. On 18 March Sihanouk was ousted as chief of state by Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. Their accession to power signaled the country's direct involvement in a war of its own with the Vietnamese Communists and also the birth of the present-day Khmer insurgency.

The Building of an Insurgency

At the time of Sihanouk's downfall, the insurgent forces operating in various sections of the country lacked cohesion and coordination, and probably numbered no more than several thousand. The Vietnamese Communists lost little time in responding to the challenges and opportunities they perceived in the altered Cambodian scene. In a matter of days after Sihanouk's ouster, the Viet Cong started to put out the line that they would "back Cambodian revolutionary forces in the same manner that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has been backing the Pathet Lao." They began to move in this direction at once. In late March 1970, orders went out to Viet Cong border provinces to prepare to administer adjacent areas in Cambodia and to send advisory groups to their Khmer counterparts in Cambodia. In places where "relations with friends" were lacking, the Viet Cong were ordered "to infiltrate the people and local government to guide them in a struggle against the reactionary gang."

Viet Cong cadres came in small teams of propagandists, security personnel, and Khmer linguists. After entering a Cambodian hamlet, they would set up a pro-Sihanouk front committee to govern locally and to form guerrilla and militia units. This type of activity initially was limited to the more readily accessible eastern and southeastern border areas, which already were

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under de facto Viet Cong influence. This activity was extended into other sections of the country, when Vietnamese Communist main-force units were pushed deeper into the interior in the wake of the US - South Vietnamese incursion in May 1970. By mid-summer, some of the Communists had moved as far west as Siem Reap Province, where they occupied the Angkor Wat temple complex.

As the Communist invasion of Cambodia proceeded, their need for Khmer-speaking cadres to help establish a Khmer insurgent organization became more pressing. To meet this demand, "Cambodian Proselyting Sections" were sent to enlist ethnic Khmers in South Vietnam's delta area. Cadres from North Vietnam infiltrated into Cambodia in late 1970 and early 1971 to serve as advisers and instructors to fledgling insurgent military and political organizations.

At the outset, the Vietnamese Communists' efforts to develop a Khmer insurgent organization stressed speed over quality. There were difficulties besides a shortage of qualified personnel; the Vietnamese had to cope with Cambodian peasants who lacked "political awareness." More important, the Vietnamese had to contend with deep-seated Cambodian racial animosity, which has frequently resulted in physical confrontation between "teacher" and "pupil." Despite the complications, the persistent Vietnamese Communists plugged away at their task. Over the past two years—with increasing help from Khmer cadres trained in North Vietnam—they have developed the small Khmer insurgent military arm into a sizable and relatively respectable fighting force. On the political side, they have extended their organizational activities deep into the countryside and have at least part of every province under their effective administration.

The Military Apparatus

The development of the insurgents' military force deviated from the pyramidal pattern used in South Vietnam. There the Communists first established guerrilla forces at the hamlet and village level, then local force units at the district and province level, and finally main-force units at the military region level. In Cambodia, because of the pressure of time, all three echelons of the insurgent force structure were created simultaneously. The North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong served as the principal elements around which the indigenous insurgent forces were established.

Command and control functions were originally handled by the Vietnamese Communists, but a separate chain of command for the insurgents

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Insurgent Territorial Regions



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gradually developed. It was staffed almost entirely by ethnic Khmer, many of whom were trained in North Vietnam. This arrangement not only helped to reduce racial hostilities between the Vietnamese and Cambodians, but also enabled many Vietnamese Communist cadre to return to South Vietnam.

Currently, the identified insurgent command structure consists of the Standing Committee of the "Party Central Committee" at the national level and regional organizations in the major geographic areas, which are responsible for the administration of all military and political affairs within their boundaries. The six regions are: 203 (southwest), 304 (north), 405 (southwest), 505 (possibly the northeast), 560 (northwest), and 607 (the Phnom Penh region—sometimes called 707). Each region is subdivided into sectors (also known as subregions or zones), districts, and subdistricts. Special military commands have been formed at the local level to conduct specific military operations.

The development of a nationwide coordinated command and control system, supported by an expanding radio network, has contributed to the steady improvement in the insurgents' combat capabilities. In addition to helping them conduct multi-battalion operations, this system allows the insurgents to maintain tight control over combat units while moving them from one district or sector to another. It enables the insurgent command to respond to problems arising at lower echelons, including desertions and disputes among local commanders or between the insurgents and the Vietnamese Communists. This is in marked contrast to the situation of just a year ago, when local problems often went unresolved.

The creation over the past year of a new echelon in the insurgent force structure, the subdistrict sapper unit, has added to their military capabilities. These platoon-sized units appear to have been formed largely from local guerrilla and militia forces. They have been used to harass government lines of communication and Cambodian Army outposts. They have also served as guards or reinforcements for larger units operating in or moving through a subdistrict. The sapper units have probably increased total insurgent combat strength from 5,000 to 10,000 men—or about 30 percent.

Current Military Strength and Performance

Official US order of battle holdings on the insurgents, which are based exclusively on identified battalions, set the insurgents' total strength at only 23,000 men—some 75 battalions in all. Given the clear signs of progressive insurgent growth, however, a more likely estimate of insurgent combat

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forces in Cambodia is from 40,000 to 50,000 men—an impressive increase from the estimated 15,000 to 30,000 in late 1971. Included in this total are about 30,000 troops in infantry battalions, 5,000 to 10,000 in district companies, and an additional 5,000 to 10,000 men in the subdistrict sapper units. The estimate does not include personnel assigned to the insurgent political system, administrative service units, or the village and hamlet guerrilla forces.

Individual insurgent units probably vary considerably in quality. In the first two years of the war in Cambodia, the insurgents played no more than a supporting role in Vietnamese Communist main-force units operating in Cambodia. Last spring, however, when most Vietnamese units were committed to the Communists' all-out offensive in South Vietnam, the Khmer insurgents had to take on a greater share of the fighting. In the past few months, they have been particularly effective in applying periodic pressure against several key highways in the south and the southwest, tying up large numbers of government troops in the process. In addition, they have been able to hold on to all of the Cambodian countryside originally captured by their Vietnamese comrades.

The Political Base

At the same time that the Vietnamese Communists were building a Khmer insurgent military force, they were also building a political organization. This was a relatively easy task in the northeast and in the other areas bordering South Vietnam where a Vietnam Communist presence had long existed. As the fighting in Cambodia spread, the Vietnamese and their North Vietnam - trained Khmer cadre slowly extended their political influence and administrative control into other provinces. This process was—and still is—facilitated by Phnom Penh's failure to use its own military and political resources on any systematic or sustained basis to try to check or reverse the Communists' inroads in the countryside. Statistics in Cambodia are unreliable, but one estimate is that the insurgents are now in a position to exert some form of political control over approximately 3.5 million of Cambodia's 8 million people and at least 70 percent of its territory.

Primarily because of a shortage of trained Khmer cadre, the insurgent political apparatus has developed from the top down. Regions were organized and staffed first, and then the sector, district, and lower level agencies. The process has by now reached the village or hamlet level. The various components of the insurgent administrative structure are, like their military forces, modeled on Viet Cong lines. At the region and sector levels, for

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example, there are usually sections for finance and economy, propaganda and training, civil health, military proselyting, and security affairs. In addition to these civilian offices, there are military affairs committees which oversee the region or sector military forces, procure local supplies, and recruit and indoctrinate troops. Initially most of these offices were filled by Vietnamese Communist cadre; over the past year Khmers have begun to take over.

There has been little resistance to the expanding insurgency. Standard Communist population control measures—such as strict travel restrictions and local security committees—keep the villagers in line. If need be, the insurgents do not hesitate to use coercive measures on the local peasants. The Communists have executed uncooperative village officials, burned homes, and—more frequently—relocated by force entire villages to insurgent-controlled areas.

The ideologically disinterested Cambodian peasant offers little resistance; at the same time, he does not support the insurgent cause with much enthusiasm. The Communists have acknowledged that one of their main problems is to find some way to stimulate the peasants' interest in politics. The restoration of Sihanouk was the original justification for the Cambodian "revolution," but this theme has worn thin over time and has been dropped in some areas. The insurgents do not even have a land redistribution issue going for them as the Viet Cong do in South Vietnam. Land is abundant in Cambodia, and the insurgents usually are forced to resort to a rather unexciting propaganda pitch: fight for the downfall of the corrupt, US-supported administration in Phnom Penh.

The Insurgent Economy

As they have consolidated their political control, the insurgents have made better use of local economic resources. Simple trade associations, along with production and marketing cooperatives, have been set up in many areas to tighten control over production and distribution. These organizations have generated needed tax revenues on a systematic basis and effectively curtailed the government's access to local produce. Cottage industries have been set up to manufacture clothes, simple war materiel, and other goods.

In the past, insurgent efforts to make and carry out their own economic policies had often led to disputes with the Vietnamese Communists over issues such as the distribution of tax proceeds and the allocation of supplies. More recently, however, these frictions have diminished, and the insurgents

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are becoming more sophisticated in economic management. Cooperatives are now more formally organized, and there are explicit arrangements for wholesale purchases in government markets of items in short supply.

The insurgents have also limited the government's access to domestic production by cutting many of Cambodia's transportation routes. The interdiction of key transport routes has from time to time caused serious rice and petroleum shortages in Phnom Penh and troublesome commodity shortages in most provincial towns.

On the other hand, the insurgents' economic controls have added to their problems with the Khmer peasant, who is infused with an independent entrepreneurial spirit. Rural villagers have frequently chafed under tight insurgent farm price controls, the high prices charged consumers at cooperative markets, and the initiation of communal agricultural practices. Many have abandoned their farms and fled to government-held regions. As a result, agricultural production in some insurgent-controlled areas has suffered.

The Elusive Khmer Communist Party

The Khmer Communist Party undoubtedly has the responsibility for the basic direction of the insurgency. The party's evolution, present size, organization, leadership, objectives, and relations with Hanoi and Peking are relative unknowns. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the Vietnamese Communists tried unsuccessfully to form a Khmer Communist party in the early 1950s. In the late 1950s, the Vietnamese lent propaganda and financial support to the leftist Pracheachon (People's) Party in Phnom Penh. Sihanouk saw to it that this small front group never attained a wide popular following, however, and effectively destroyed at least its above-ground apparatus when he jailed most of its leaders in 1962. From that time until Sihanouk's ouster, there were no surface manifestations of a Communist Party in Cambodia.

Who's Who: Khieu, Hou, and Hu

Despite the paucity of information on the party, it is possible to speculate with some confidence about its present composition. Its hard-core membership probably numbers several thousand. Most of these are probably Cambodians sent to North Vietnam from 1954 on for training. They have been returning to Cambodia in increasing numbers over the past year to take up positions of authority. Party leadership is said to be in the hands of three of the key "ministers" in Sihanouk's Peking-based "government." The three allegedly have been in Cambodia guiding the insurgency since the early days of the war.

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"Defense Minister"
Khieu Samphan



"Interior Minister"
Hou Yuon



"Information Minister"
Hu Nim



**"Special Envoy
of the Interior"**
Ieng Sary



**Pham Van Dong greets Sihanouk in Hanoi
with the ever-present Ieng Sary looking on.**

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This triumvirate, known in Cambodia as the "three ghosts," consists of "defense minister" Khieu Samphan, "interior minister" Hou Yuon, and "information minister" Hu Nim. All are young, French-trained intellectuals who were among the leaders of the leftist or pro-Communist political faction in Phnom Penh during most of the 1960s. They dropped out of sight in 1967 amid widely circulated rumors that Sihanouk had had them killed in secret. To this day they have made no public appearances that confirm their existence.

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The Sihanouk Dilemma: External and Internal Dimensions

The Khmer insurgents are ostensibly an arm of Sihanouk's Peking-based "Royal Government of National Union" and its associated front group, the "National United Front of Kampuchea." As such, they are supposedly under the control of Sihanouk and his immediate entourage, who occupy top positions in the Peking exile structure. But Khmer Communist interests in Peking—and perhaps Hanoi—most likely are represented by Ieng Sary, not Sihanouk. Ieng Sary suddenly appeared in the Chinese capital during the summer of 1971 bearing the title of "special envoy of the interior." Like Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon and Hu Nim, he first came under Communist influence during his student days in France. He, too, drew Sihanouk's fire for his leftist activities and, in 1963, went into a long period of hiding that ended only with his emergence in Peking. He has stayed close by Sihanouk's side ever since, and the attention he has received from the Chinese and North Vietnamese suggests that he is being groomed for future political stardom in Cambodia. Ieng Sary, for instance, accompanied Sihanouk to Hanoi in early February for consultations with the North Vietnamese and while there met privately with Premier Pham Van Dong. From all accounts, Ieng Sary and his party colleagues in Peking maintain "correct" relations with the deposed prince while doing what they can privately to monitor and control his political activities.

This uneasy marriage of convenience reflects the basic tension between the Khmer Communists and the Sihanouk nationalists. The nationalist-Communist split is by no means confined to Peking; it extends deep into the insurgency in Cambodia. Aside from its Communist hard core, the insurgent movement harbors both the "Khmer Rouge"—elements who opposed Sihanouk before his ouster and remain hostile to him—and the "Khmer Rumdoh"—pro-Sihanouk insurgents who hope to see the prince restored to power. The question of Sihanouk's future is the insurgency's most divisive internal problem and the main source of factionalism within its ranks.

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Little is known about the relative strength of the pro- and anti-Sihanouk factions, but there is little doubt as to where the Khmer Communists stand. Although they probably appreciate Sihanouk's skills as a propagandist, his ability to attract diplomatic attention, and the value of his residual following among the Cambodian peasantry, they harbor strong reservations about his return to Cambodia in any position of real or potential power. Ironically, the Communists' reservations regarding Sihanouk represent one area of potential common ground between them and Lon Nol and his closest supporters, who remain adamantly opposed to any settlement that would return Sihanouk to Cambodia.

The Sihanouk question also represents a difficult political problem for the insurgents' principal backers. Although very little is known about the political relationships between the Khmer Communists and Peking and Hanoi, it stands to reason that the Khmer Communists' ties to Hanoi are closer, if only because of the direct North Vietnamese involvement and support. Both Peking and Hanoi still endorse Sihanouk and his "government" as the sole legitimate Cambodian political authority, but there is good reason to believe that the Chinese stamp of approval is far more enthusiastic. The Chinese would be happy to see Sihanouk restored to power because of their long and close relationship with the prince. The Vietnamese Communists see things differently. The triumphant return of a Sihanouk openly flaunting his relationship with Peking as a guarantee against Vietnamese encroachment would offer Hanoi little reward for its substantial investment in Cambodia. A triumphant return would also sacrifice Lon Nol and involve a compromise between Sihanouk's entourage and those elements in Phnom Penh not unalterably opposed to the prince. It would also emphasize the equities of the pro-Sihanouk insurgent faction at the expense of the Hanoi-oriented Communists.

The divergence of Chinese and Vietnamese interests will complicate movement toward a Cambodian settlement, but will not necessarily prevent it. With the signing of a Vietnam accord and with the Laos peace negotiations apparently in a conclusive stage, both Peking and Hanoi appear ready to seek an end to the fighting in Cambodia and some form of political compromise. In the field, however, the Khmer insurgents have so far refused to heed Sihanouk's proposal that they reciprocate Phnom Penh's recent cessation of all offensive operations. The stage thus seems set for an interesting and revealing test of Hanoi's control over its Khmer Communist clients. With peace in the air all around them, the Khmer Communists may well find it difficult, if not impossible, to buck the political tides now

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running in Indochina. In the face of sustained pressure from their North Vietnamese mentors, they would probably be hard pressed to sustain the morale and discipline of their troops and to continue their foot-dragging.

The arrangement of a cease-fire in Cambodia would be a significant first step toward the beginning of a political dialogue between the insurgents and Phnom Penh. It will, of course, bring the nettlesome question of Sihanouk and his future to the fore. Final settlement of the Cambodian conflict will have to wait until this central issue can be thrashed out by all concerned.

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